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HOW MUCH DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE DEVIL

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We cannot believe in Christ without believing in the devil, because Christ is the one who told us about him, warned us against him, and taught us how to make him helpless.

How Much Do We Know About The Devil?

M. J. Huber, C.SS.R.

IF YOU DON'T believe in the devil, read this anyhow. Before you finish reading, you *may* begin to believe in the devil, and that will be a blessing for you; because they who do not believe in the devil are often his easiest victims and his most helpful assistants.

If you *do* believe in the devil, read this anyhow. This is not an attempt to prove that there is a devil, but an effort to get to know more about him. Before you finish reading, you will not only believe in the devil more firmly, but you will be much better acquainted with him, and that will be a great help to you; because the

more you know about the devil, the more surely will you try to keep out of his reach and to steer clear of all his dirty work.



Who is the devil?

The answer to this question is the first thing we must know about the devil, because the devil does not want us to know who he is. The devil would like very much to have us be completely ignorant of his existence, for then he could really go to work on us in a knock-down, drag-out affair that would not even begin to look like a fight.

If the devil knows that we are aware of his existence, but that we do not know too much about him, he tries to put wrong ideas about himself into our heads. The devil wants to be misunderstood. He rejoices in being misjudged and underrated. If

the devil can get us to think of him as a little imp in red tights, his face and head covered by a black hood with his horns sticking out at the top, a long three-pronged fork in his hand and his spear-pointed tail curled around his legs, he will be devilishly happy. If our idea of the devil takes the form of such a ridiculous caricature of him, we are not going to pay any more attention to him than we would pay to a fly that we can shoo away with a flick of our hand. In our minds we shall place the devil in the same class with the goblins and fairies we heard about in our childhood. After all, who believes in goblins and fairies? And if we go far enough along with this kind of thinking about the devil, it is almost as easy to find ourselves asking, "After all, who *really* believes in the devil?"

And that is just what the devil wants. The devil does not want us

to know about him or believe in him; and if we do believe in him, he wants us to underestimate him, and even make jokes about him, so that we shall not be on our guard against him.

So we must get back to our question and learn the honest answer.

Who is the devil?

The devil is the chief of the fallen rebel angels who were pitched out of heaven and into hell when they committed sin. All these angels became demons. We have become accustomed to calling all the fallen angels devils, but to be correct we ought to call them demons. There is only one devil, and he is the chief of all the demons, their commander and leader, and devil is his name.

The devil is known by different names, such as Satan, Beelzebub, Belial, The Tempter, The Enemy; but

no matter what name we give him, he is the greatest enemy we can meet on our way to heaven.

The devil is our opponent, the obstructor in our way, the destructive one, trying to accomplish only one purpose: to bring us into hell with him and the other demons. Everything he does is done out of wickedness, mockery and hatred of God, hatred of the good angels, hatred of us, hatred of the other devils. By his own free choice he is confirmed in evil. Long ago he made his choice between good and evil. He chose evil, and, everlastingly, he is trying to lead us to make the same sad choice.

The devil knows that God is infinitely lovable, and he hates God. He knows that we are made for heaven and for God, and he hates us. Jesus Christ said of the devil, "He was a murderer from the beginning." A

murderer, who comes only to kill, to steal and to destroy.

The devil is the enemy of the human race. From the very beginning he was busy at his work of murder. Long ago, amid the trees and flowers of paradise, he crawled into the life of man as a snake and committed his first murder by stinging the minds of Eve and Adam with his poisoned tongue when he talked them into committing sin. And so, after dying by sin, they were condemned by God to die the death of the body. Truly a murderer is the devil who brought to our earth the curse of death with its long train of sweaty labors and pains. Every child now sees before it at the beginning of its life the slimy trail of the snake in the grass of the garden. And then the angry God thundering those awful words: "Dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return. Because thou hast done this thing, thou shalt die the death." Ruefully we

dream of the happiness that would have been ours had Satan not succeeded.

God could have created other worlds on other plans; He could have chosen other means and ways of redemption; but once He chose the present order of events we must abide by the record given us in the Bible. And here we can trace the presence of a personal being; a being endowed with mind and will; a mind with angelic intelligence; a will obstinately fixed on sin; a being who is the enemy of God and man.

Say it a thousand times every day, and you will not say it too often. The devil is our ENEMY, and at every moment he is trying to drag our soul down into hell for all eternity.



In the Bible we have proof that the devil is the personal enemy of Jesus Christ. In the garden of paradise Our Lord was pointed out as the Redeemer who would crush the head of the serpent who is the devil. At the beginning of His public career Christ meets the devil in single combat in the loneliness of the desert. The devil tempts him three times and each time the tempter fails.

It was the devil who entered the heart of Judas and led him to carry out the betrayal of his Master. And when He was to be sentenced to death, Our Lord spoke those words so simple yet so dreadful: "But this is your hour and the power of darkness."

The devil appears in Scripture as the enemy of Christ's kingdom, the enemy of the little flock which He had patiently gathered about Himself, the enemy of all those who would

ever line up on His side. In the parable of the seed that was sown, the devil picks the seed of grace from the hearts of men. In the parable of the cockle and the wheat, it is the devil who slinks about at dead of night sowing the weeds. Even when forced from the soul of a sinner, he will return to his work of soul-murder and bring with him seven other demons to lead the soul back into sin if the person has not adopted special means of protection against him.

Above all it is the devil's plan to secure the downfall of those who work for God in the spread and preservation of His kingdom. How sadly Christ warned the Apostles before He was taken prisoner: "Simon, behold Satan has desired to have you . . . but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail."

St. Peter tries to make us understand how much the devil means

business, when he tells of the devil's strength and raging hatred. He tells us to be on guard — that our enemy, the devil, is on the loose, roaming around like a roaring lion, looking for meat to satisfy his hunger, ready to leap upon anyone who comes within his reach.

When we read these things about the devil in the Bible, we can begin to understand better why we cannot afford to be indifferent about the devil or to have warped ideas about him and his power and about what he is trying to do to us.



While it is true that the devil hates us and is constantly trying by temptation to turn us away from God, we must remember that the devil never tempts any human being except with the permission of God.

It is no solution of the problem of temptation to give the devil credit for

every temptation we experience. Let us give the devil his due; but let us not give him more than his due. There are a good number of human beings about whom the devil does not need to concern himself very much. They are their own best tempters. The devil merely leaves the makings of a few good strong temptations lying around somewhere in the neighborhood, for he knows that these persons will probably stumble over them sooner or later and build up the temptation for themselves.

The devil also has two very capable assistants to help him in the work of tempting people to commit sin, and they are what we call the world and the flesh.

By the world we mean all the false rules and plans of living that men have made up for themselves contrary to the rules and plan of God; the whispered suggestions, the de-

ceitful glitter, the evil companions, the bad example, the dangerous occasions of sin, dances, theatres, movies, television, parking, amusements that lead to sin.

By the flesh we mean that inclination within us that is a hangover from original sin, the inclination not only to lust, but to gluttony in food and drink, to covetousness, to envy, to sloth and to all deadly sin.

And make no mistake about it. The world and the flesh can get us into all kinds of messes even without the help of the devil.

But there is a devil.

And the devil not only tempts us himself, but he organizes the world and the flesh and by his brilliant angelic intelligence gives them expert direction so that the temptations coming from the world and the flesh pack a powerful punch. Many times

what seems to be exclusively a temptation of the world or the flesh is aroused and directed by the devil in the precise manner, at the precise time and place, best calculated to lead us into sin. The devil misses no tricks and he always has a few trumps in reserve. He plays with a marked deck of cards, and he deals every hand; and when he deals, he deals from the top, the middle and the bottom of the deck.

Remember that this is a fight for your eternal life against a wicked and merciless enemy. When you belittle the danger, you make a bad mistake.

Listen to St. Paul. St. Paul was no fool. He says: "Brethren, be strengthened in the Lord and . . . put on the armor of God that you may be able to stand against the cunning of the devil. For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the Principalities and the

Powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness on high . . . in all things taking up the shield of faith with which you may be able to quench the fiery darts of the most wicked one."

St. Paul is telling us that we haven't a chance against the devil if we try to take him on barehanded. All our will power, all our human prudence and cleverness, all our strength of character, is no match whatever for the devil's keen intelligence and stupendous power. No one will ever make a gun to shoot the devil and stop him dead in his tracks, and not even the atomic bomb or the hydrogen bomb and all their successors can interrupt his deadly work of hate for even a moment.

But we do have powerful weapons against the devil and temptation. St. Paul tells us to put on the armor of

God, to take the shield of faith. We have the plan of defense mapped out for us: stay away from the occasions and dangers of sin; pray to God for the help and strength we need to overcome temptation and remain faithful to Him; receive the sacraments of confession and Holy Communion regularly; make use of the weapons of defense which we can have with us or around us during the day and during the night, namely, the sacramentals.

Wear a blessed medal, not as a charm against the devil, but as a sacramental, trusting that through the prayer of the Church in blessing the medal and through your confidence and reliance on the blessing upon the medal, you will be protected against the devil. Carry a blessed rosary or a blessed crucifix; call on the holy names of Jesus, Mary, Joseph. Make the sign of the cross. The devil hates the cross, and the

devil hates holy water. So, best of all, make the sign of the cross with holy water. If you take the devil seriously, as you should, you will keep a supply of holy water in your home and have holy water fonts at strategic places in your home. But remember that it is *holy water*, remember that it is *a sacramental* and not a horseshoe or a rabbit's foot, and only if you are in God's friendship, and use it reverently as a sacramental will it give the devil the bum's rush. It is *the sign of the cross* that the devil fears and not just the swipe of your hand across your head and chest.

Sometimes God permits the devil to annoy certain persons in a physical manner. We do not need to worry very much that this will happen to us, because it happens to very few people. Strangely enough, however, the human inclination is to make the mistake of being more worried and

apprehensive about these physical attacks upon us than about the harm the devil can do to our soul.

There are three ways in which the devil can annoy or attack human beings physically. The first is called *infestation*. In this kind of physical attack the devil does not act directly upon the person but upon the things around the person. We know that the Cure' of Ars was bothered in this way. He spent long, hard hours in the confessional. Then the devil would frequently come to his room at night and raise such a riot that the good priest could not sleep even during the few hours he allowed himself for rest. The Cure' admitted that at first these attacks frightened him, but he soon noticed that the devil always raised the biggest row on the night before some toughened sinners came to confession. He said, "I am quite happy now when the devil torments me. It is a good sign. There is

always a big haul of fish the next day." Again he said, "The devil gave me a good shaking last night; we shall have plenty of penitents today. The devil shows in this way how stupid he is, for he himself tells me about the arrival of big sinners."

So you see, the devil torments even holy persons, because they are holy and by their holiness snatch many souls away from him.

Sometimes the devil makes use of the second kind of physical attack which is called *obsession*. He attacks the person directly as he did in the case of Job in the Old Testament, but he does not enter into the person. You remember from your Bible history how the devil hounded Job, with God's permission, until he was a scab-covered beggar sitting on a manure pile.

In the third kind of physical attack the devil not only strikes from

the outside but actually enters into the body and its activities. This is called *diabolical possession*. The devil speaks with the tongue and lips of the person he has entered, distorts the face, gestures with the hands, walks with the feet of the person of whom he has taken possession. He may allow the possessed person to act normally for a time and then take over control again. He will make the person discuss events of which the possessed person has no natural knowledge whatsoever. He will make the person speak languages he has never learned, tell about things that are happening thousands of miles away. Again he may make the possessed person howl, rage, blaspheme, strike himself, attack others.

Even though the devil gets permission from God to take possession of a person in this kind of physical attack, he can do nothing whatever directly to hurt the person spiritually

or force him to commit sin. He cannot damn that person or drag him down to hell.

The Roman Ritual contains the solemn form of prayer for driving the devil out of a possessed person. But the Church gives strict instructions about the use of this prayer: "The priest must not be quick to judge that this or that person is possessed by the devil. He must rather look for the signs which distinguish diabolical possession from physical or mental infirmity."

Further, the Church forbids the priest to perform the solemn rite of exorcism without authorization from the bishop. This authorization the bishop will not give until he has convinced himself that it is a clear case of diabolical possession. It would be exposing sacred things to ridicule if exorcism were used to drive the devil out when the devil was not really in.

Do not worry about the physical attacks of the devil, such as diabolical possession. It is so rare that there is no probability that it will ever happen to you. What you should really fear is the *ordinary activity* of the devil; for on no day of your life and least of all at the hour of death may you hope to escape that completely. And remember that the ordinary activity of the devil consists in this, that he is continually — together with your own inclinations to evil and the bad influences around you — he is continually trying to get you to commit sin, to die in sin and so become his possession forever.

Be wise and protect yourself by using the best weapons you can find: keep away from the dangers and occasions of sin; pray frequently every day, for grace and strength to overcome temptation and sin; receive the sacraments of confession and Holy Communion often; make devout use

of blessed things which the Church gives you, the sacramentals.

And the thing you ought to do right now is to take a scouting trip around the inside of your home to see if you can find any holy water. If you don't find any, get a bottle and take a walk over to the church as soon as you can and get some holy water. You need it. Get those holy water fonts and put them up next to the doors of your home where they belong. Then use that holy water frequently, on yourself and on your children, and teach them how to use it even when they are infants toddling about the house.

The devil hates holy water. He hates it so much that, for him, even the smallest drop of it is hotter than all hell.

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